

Vilnius Offers to Suspend Laws

Lithuanian Move Conditioned on Moscow Opening Talks

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MOSCOW, May 16—The Lithuanian legislature voted tonight to suspend the effects of all legislation passed after its March 11 declaration of independence if Moscow agrees to open negotiations on the secession crisis.

The republic's Supreme Council, which passed the resolution tonight in closed session, was attempting to follow a compromise plan proposed last month by the leaders of France and West Germany and, at the same time, to make Lithuania's position more flexible, in line with that of the two other Baltic republics, Latvia and Estonia.

The resolution, a major concession by the Lithuanians, allows for an indefinite transition period before actual independence.

It also would indefinitely permit Moscow to retain control over its properties on Lithuanian territory, such as the railroads, and allow young men the choice of serving in the Soviet army. The resolution also said the parliament will protect the rights of those citizens who wish to remain on Lithuanian territory but still retain Soviet citizenship after independence.

Last week, the three Baltic republics decided to form a united front and press Moscow for a common negotiating process on independence. Until now, Lithuania's strategy for gaining independence

had been less conciliatory than that of the other Baltic states. As a result, Moscow has imposed a partial economic blockade on Lithuania.

In the Russian Republic, the largest in the Soviet Union, the republic's Supreme Soviet delayed the election of a president. The procedural battle came on the first day of the newly elected legislature's session and was interpreted as a tactical victory for the maverick populist Boris Yeltsin, who is trying to win the office as a power base.

The Russian legislature voted 495 to 494 to put off the balloting until later this week. Yeltsin's chief rival for the office is a junior member of the Soviet Communist Politburo, Alexander Vlasov, who currently is the republic's premier. Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev and the Communist Party leadership, who have been humiliated in the past by Yeltsin's stinging, personal attacks, are clearly backing Vlasov and were hoping that a quick vote would give him an advantage.

Yeltsin and his supporters said they feel they have about an even chance to win the Russian presidency. A victory for Yeltsin may not do much more in the short run than embarrass Gorbachev, but it would give his best-known antagonist a major base of operations and an even greater platform. Many of Gorbachev's critics, especially in the working class, see Yeltsin as more decisive and closer to the problems of everyday life.

Since being fired from the leadership at the end of 1987, Yeltsin has become a populist hero by launching numerous attacks against Gorbachev, accusing him of failing to side with the progressive forces in Soviet society.

In an appearance at the Cinematographers' Union earlier this week, Yeltsin accused Gorbachev of trying to undermine his bid to become the Russian president.

The political pressure from the Baltics is equally wearing on Gorbachev. So far he has responded to the Baltic declarations of independence, as well as the increasingly conciliatory overtures for negotiations, by insisting that the republics go through the country's new procedures on secession. The new law requires a referendum, a waiting period of up to five years and then final approval in the national legislature.

The Baltic republics, which were annexed as part of a Nazi-Soviet pact before the start of World War II, insist that they are exempt from such a law and are merely "restoring" the independence that was snatched away from them in 1940.

Some Moscow officials have insisted that Lithuania repeal its March 11 declaration of independence, but others, including Gorbachev's spokesman, Arkady Maslenikov, have said that a "freeze" on the legislation passed since the declaration could open the way to negotiations.